



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – February 2013

The Sonoma County Water Agency is continually planning and implementing the Russian River Biological Opinion requirements. The following project updates provide a brief synopsis of current work. For more detailed information about these activities, please visit www.sonomacountywater.org.

Dry Creek Demonstration Project

- Construction is completed at the Quivira Vineyards and Winery segment of the demonstration project, which consists primarily of a 300-foot long backwater channel. During the large storms in late November, the backwater channel (which will provide much needed winter refuge habitat for young endangered coho and steelhead salmon) filled up as designed. Antennas installed to track hatchery fish detected several fish taking refuge in the channel and spending considerable time there. **See photo on following page!**
- Construction plans and right-of-way negotiations are underway for the remainder of the one-mile demonstration project. The construction bid will be advertised on February 7.
- Work to clear vegetation from the site of a large backwater pool feature on the Amista Winery property below Lambert Bridge commenced on January 28 and should be completed by Friday January 31st. Excavation of the backwater pool and placement of large wood and rock will occur this summer.

Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement

- Site identification, outreach to landowners and design consultant selection is underway for the second and third miles of habitat enhancement.
- The Water Agency, National Marine Fisheries Service, Department of Fish & Game and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are working with consultants, ESSA, to develop clear success measures for habitat enhancement. The plan should be completed in early 2013.

Tributary Fish Passage and Habitat Enhancement Projects

- The Grape Creek passage project (creating fish passage through a box culvert) construction is complete. Sotoyome Resource Conservation District is managing the project for the Water Agency. **See photo!**
- Construction on the Wallace Creek project (the final tributary project) has been stalled due to lack of easement with one landowner. Other options are being pursued.
- During the summer season, thousands of juvenile steelhead and coho were counted and released in migrant traps in the Russian River, at Mirabel, in Dry Creek, Mark West Creek and Dutch Bill Creek. Final counts will be available later this year.

Mirabel Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement

- In 2011, the Water Agency received a \$255,000 California Department of Fish and Game Fishery Restoration Grant for design of the project. Based on preliminary designs, the Water Agency applied for a construction grant through the same program. The grant announcement is expected within the week.
- The 90% design is ongoing. An Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration were released on December 10, comments were received and document will be before the Water Agency board on January 29.
- The inflatable dam was lowered November 21-23. While final numbers are being verified, the Chinook salmon count is in excess of 6,300, breaking previous records.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

- The 2012 Lagoon Management Period ended on October 15. The estuary closed briefly during the 2012 management period, but there were no opportunities to implement the outlet channel. Biological and water quality monitoring took place throughout the Lagoon Management Period.
- A study of the jetty is underway. The purpose of the study is to determine if and how it impacts the formation of the sand bar (barrier beach) and lagoon water surface elevation. While the historic component of the study was completed at the end of 2012, field investigations have been stalled, due to a lack of permit from the California Coastal Commission.

Fish Flow Project

Work is occurring internally on the preparation of the draft Environmental Impact Report for the Fish Habitat Flows and Water Rights Project. The EIR is being prepared by Water Agency staff, with assistance from consultants on some areas of impact analysis. A draft EIR is anticipated to be released in 2013.

Interim Flow Changes

- The 2012 Temporary Urgency Change order period ended on October 15. Work is underway to prepare the fisheries, water quality and water use efficiency reports required under the order.

Public Outreach & Reporting

- Staff is working with Quivira to identify a date for the WAC/TAC to tour the demonstration project.
- The Public Policy Facilitating Committee met on December 20 for its annual progress update on implementation of the Biological Opinion. Approximately 100 people attended the meeting.
- ABC Channel 7 did a story on Dry Creek and Chinook salmon on November 23.
- The annual Biological Opinion Report (required by NMFS) was released in late 2012.



Backwater channel, with willow "wall."



New weir at Grape Creek, at bridge at West Dry Creek Road